

Interviewing Basics

Fall 2026

FULTON SCHOOLS
OF ENGINEERING | **career**
center

ASU Ira A. Fulton Schools of
Engineering
Arizona State University

This presentation is for technical majors seeking technical positions.

Other fields? Hiring practices differ, so the content and format may differ from the advice in this presentation.

Start with this: "What is an interview? For this presentation, any time that you are talking to a company representative, it's an interview. You are making an impression with someone who can influence your future with that company."

Your Goals, at any interview

- **Confident**
- **Competent**
- **Enthusiastic**
- **Someone that I/we can like and trust**

4 goals: read these then break each down.

Confident: research shows that the interview process is biased towards those who show confidence. Right! The question here is simple: have you done relevant work? Can you do this job? Applicants who can answer with confidence obviously impress.

Competent: Confidence alone is not enough to get the job done. Competence is important. Experiences shown on resumes are not always completely accurate, so part of the interview will be to assess your competencies.

Enthusiastic: No, not "Woo hoo, I really want this job". Enthusiasm is measured here as, "Do you seem interested? Did you read the job description? Have you done anything to understand the job, the company, the industry, ...?"

Someone we can ...: Right, no one wants to work with disagreeable co-workers or those who are untrustworthy. The interview will assess if information you have on the resume matches your actual experience and if you are a person that we want to work with.

So, let's talk about the details of interviews....

Interview process – Typical steps

- 1. Initial review:**
 - a. Assessment: test, one-way video, other automated system**
 - b. Screening call: HR, hiring manager, other (30 min)**
- 2. Followed by: Call from technical lead, hiring manager (30-60 min)**
- 3. And sometimes:**
 - a. Technical interview with 2 to 5 “technical” resources (2 to 5 hours)**
 - b. Group of “technical” resources asking questions (90 min)**

Company processes differ: Amazon, Google, Microsoft, others: have details on their websites.

You may receive explicit details in email, or in a call.

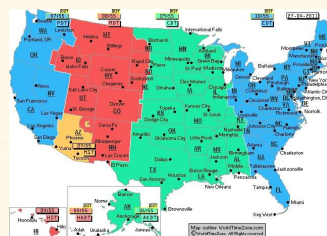
Interview process – Considerations

- 1. Online assessments, One-way video interviews:**
 - a. Do not: miss deadlines
 - b. Do: be prepared: read about the process
- 2. Who's your interviewer?**
 - a. Do not: make assumptions about background, knowledge, ...
 - b. Do: look the person up on LinkedIn
- 3. How is the interview organized?**
 - a. 1:1: phone, video, in person
 - b. 1:x: multiple interviewers: Are they together? In the same room with you? Some together and some on the call?

1. Companies will use a variety of processes to do initial screening. If you do not meet the expected performance, you will not advance to other stages of the interview process. These assessments have hard deadlines.
2. Interviewers: get information to help you understand the interviewer's background and how long that person has been at the company, in the industry, level of education in what, etc.
3. Organization: if there are multiple interviewers on the call, and some are together in a room, it is a complex situation. Pay attention to details and ensure that they can and do hear your responses. Generally, it is to the applicant's benefit to have multiple interviewers together, like a panel – they all hear the same answer.

Details: Phone and Video Interviews

- **DO know EXACTLY what time zone the call is in**
- **DO prepare for mechanical problems:**
 - Quiet area without interruptions
- **DO practice the details for a video call:**
 - Wear interview clothes
 - Check background behind you
 - Camera – look at it, not your screen or keyboard



Details: these are very simple items, but you can't succeed in the interview if you don't execute these simple details correctly.

Time Zone: this is a big issue for Arizona, due to other states moving onto or off of Daylight Savings Time. *Arizona is on Mountain Standard Time (MST) all year.* Pay close attention to how your call is scheduled.

Best advice: be prepared for the call to happen an hour EARLIER or LATER than scheduled.

Mechanical problems: happen, but you do not want to be flustered by them. Being ready prevents this. Once on the call, tell the caller how to contact you in case there is a connection issue.

Video call:

Dress: as if you were there in person.

Background: don't use the blurry background: it captures too much motion. Use a wall or closet door or – as your background.

Distractions: Be sure that other people and pets are not audible or visible.

Camera: best height is ~2" above your nose.

Check all of this with a friend before the call.

Interview Strategies

- **DO prepare: General, Behavioral, Technical**
- **DO use ~1 minute to answer the question**
- **DO answer the question directly, OR with something close**
- **DON'T end with "Does that answer your question?"**



Expect that an interview will contain questions in all three of these categories.

Use 1-2 minutes: Interviews are stressful for everyone, and you may not hear the question as intended, or it was not worded well. You do not want to take up valuable interview time answering the wrong question. Use a few minutes, and the interviewer will ask for more details if you are on track. If you are off track, the interviewer will probably rephrase the question.

Answer directly...: If you don't have that exact experience, answer with something close. Try. "The experience that I have that is closest to that is ____" and go for it.

Don't use "Does that answer...?" – this is not a confident response. If you didn't answer the question, the interviewer may rephrase or just move on. Also, skip the "That's a good question." Right, the interviewer probably thinks so, too.

All questions: relate what you do know. You want to show that you don't stop and stall out. Example: encountered an unsafe situation – you did not proceed, but you did find someone who could perform the task.

And ideally, your answers to any questions relate back to your resume. Tie your answer to some experience that is on your resume – so that the example reinforces how your experience and expertise ties to the position that you are interviewing for.

Be confident! Something about you has attracted them.
Let's look at each question type in detail...

General Interview Preparation

- **“General” interview questions are designed to:**
 - Let the applicant talk about a familiar subject
 - Assess communications skills

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These questions also test your “interviewmanship” – did you care enough to prepare?

Are you authentic in your answers? Too many students look up these answers on the web. They see ‘experts’ telling them to pick weaknesses that are actually strengths. Then everyone says they’re a perfectionist. Interviewers know you’re making this stuff up and you lose credibility.

You can make a strong or poor impression right at this point of any interview for any position. Be prepared to make a strong impression here – let’s look at the typical questions.

General Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself.

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Other general questions:

- **Why did you choose this major?**
- **Why do you want to work here?**
- **What are your strengths and/or weaknesses?**
- **Where do you see yourself in 5 years?**

Be crisp, professional, and prepared. This is a place to demonstrate confidence. **Keep answers related to the position and the qualifications.** Here are examples:

1. “Tell me...”: This question is used in ~100% of interviews, **so be prepared to answer it.** The interviewer does not want to know the history of your family, you, and blah blah. Keep this focused and target information about how you have gotten to the point of being a professional ready to contribute. Avoid distracting information. This is a place to show your “enthusiasm” – did you care enough to be prepared? Practice your answer to this question and be conversational in tone.
2. “Why did...”: This is an opportunity to show your engagement in your profession outside the classroom, and your persistence in attaining your degree. This may be an opportunity to show how you overcame wrong turns on your way to your degree, and what you learned.
3. “Why do you want...”: Your answer here displays your knowledge of the organization and perhaps the industry.
4. “What are...”: Strengths and weaknesses can be technical (Pspice, Solidworks, Aerodynamics) and non-technical job related (attention to detail, devil’s advocate, informal leader).
 - When discussing an actual weakness of yours, give the interviewer examples of how you

overcame the weakness or what you do to mitigate its effects. A good strategy is to identify a specific area of the job and how you will address your gap.

- For example, it's obvious that you have never worked in the semiconductor industry. Your plan to come up to speed is ---. You can describe how you did something similar when you went to work in __, or just acclimated yourself successfully to some other new circumstance.
5. "Where do you...": In technical fields, it's hard to see 5 years into the future. After all, it's only around 10 years ago that the iPhone was introduced (!). Align your answer with any information about the company and the industry. Do not stray off path here – as in, "I plan to go back to school to complete a PhD".

Behavioral Interviewing

“Describe a time when...”

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Why are these questions used? Because research shows that past behavior is the best predictor for success. For example, people who have overcome barriers and persevered in the past will do so in the future, even in another setting.

These questions are actually great opportunities for students, because they allow you to describe your behaviors in settings other than professional work roles.

How do you answer these questions? You create stories about your experiences and use a specific outline for your answer, called the STAR method.

Interview Preparation Grid

**Make a list of successful situations in your life
Slot those against the job description**

Topic	Story #1	Story #2
Teamwork	Understanding scope of each role in undergraduate research project	Assigning and tracking roles in FSE 100 class project
Communication	Tutoring physics to nursing students	Helping customers in part -time job
Problem Solving	Troubleshooting Arduino programming for capstone project	Resolving email distribution list issues for student organization
Conflict Management	Resolving study time in residence hall	Solving parking assignment at apartment complex
Initiative	Applying for research position after reading about it in Inner Circle	Taking on additional scope in undergraduate research project
Leadership	Making other students aware of summer internship opportunities	Creating training curriculum for incoming interns

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1. Make a list of successful situations in your life:

- Work – any workplace accomplishment
- School – coursework, teams, projects, ...
- Other experiences – hobbies, sports, groups,

2. Create a matrix of the topics requested per the job description.

3. Match the experiences to the topics.

4. Create a primary story, a backup story, and if possible, third story for each topic.

Then practice!

How do you create a “story”? ...

Behavioral Questions: STAR Technique

- **Use this outline:**
 - **Situation and Task**
 - **Action**
 - **Result**
 - **Positive outcome OR**
 - **What you learned from past mistakes**

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When using the STAR technique, it is important to remember the following:

1. **Situation:** Provide some background for context, but don't go overboard. Remember what you were asked and don't get off track.
2. **Task:** What's the issue? What needed to happen?
3. **Action:** What was done? What did **YOU** do/contribute? Be clear about what you did, what you helped others to do, etc. Remember, the question is "... when **you** ...".
4. **Result:** What was the outcome? Don't leave the interviewer hanging. They need to know the 'end' of the story. Try to be detailed with the result.
 - It can be powerful to describe an experience that did not work out, but you learned from it, and was able to change something and get a positive outcome or know now how you would do [--] differently.
5. **Relevant:** best answers are relevant to the role, and/or relate to something on your resume. If you are not able to answer the question with a work experience or experience that is listed, be sure to "add more words" to orient the interviewer. For example, start the description of the situation with information to show that this is not part of an experience from your resume: "I have experience with overcoming a difficult co-worker. I don't have it listed on my resume, but when I was volunteering at ---, I worked with a --".

Let's talk about the technical part....

Technical Interview

- **Job description indicates a need for experience with ---**
 - **Be able to explain your experience with ---**
 - **Be able to explain what --- is best suited for**

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Technical: will focus on application of skills and techniques.

Again: If you don't have that exact experience, answer with something close. Try. "The experience that I have that is closest to that is ____" and go for it. If you've used something similar (SPSS vs SAS for example), discuss what you have done, demonstrate both competency and an ability/willingness to learn quickly.

Asked about something that you will study next semester? Tell the interviewer, and describe how your coursework this semester is preparing you for that topic.

For any technical questions:

- Ask questions about boundary conditions and assumptions
- Show that you can problem solve, not just code or guess the answer

Questions for Them

Demonstrate your professionalism, business acumen, and competence

AND

“Can you tell me the next steps and time frame for your hiring decision?”

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1. Can you describe a typical day for the ____ in your organization?
2. Could you give me some examples of projects that I'd be working on?
3. What would you say are the three most important skills needed to excel in this position?
4. I've read about ---. Do you expect your organization to be affected by this?

Write out questions in advance so

1. You don't forget them when you're nervous
2. It shows you are prepared

If the interviewer does not cover it, ask about next steps and timeframes for the interview process. It's a very professional question.

Don't ask about salary, benefits, vacation.....but be prepared to discuss if the interviewer brings it up.

Next Steps: For You

- **Brief “Thank You” email**
 - **Subject: Your Name/Posting # or title of the position**
 - **Thank the interviewer**
 - **Restate your interest in the role and your skills**

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Send this day of, or day after, the interview – not the following week.

If you do not have contact information for your interviewer, send the message to the scheduler and ask that person to forward.

Summary

- **Confident, Competent, Enthusiastic... how'd you do?**

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Successful outcome:

Depends on many elements – job may get cancelled, a better applicant shows up, ...
Initial outcome is not the end of your relationship with the organization. If they were impressed by your interview, you may get contacted again for another position.

Additional Information

- **1:1 appointments and workshops on career topics:** use ASU CareerLink:
 - <https://career-asu.12twenty.com/login>
 - Workshops: “Events”: search for “FSE Workshops”
 - Appointments: Select College (“Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering”)→pick the appointment type →check for advisors which start with “FSE ...”
- **Résumé review:** <https://skillsfirst.com/organizations/asu-engineering>
 - Use AI tools to review your resume and compare it to a job description
 - Submit your résumé for review without an appointment
- **Fulton Schools Career Center website** <https://career.engineering.asu.edu/>
 - Presentations and tools

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Engineering Workshops (small group sessions) on career topics: access Events from the landing page

Resume Review, offline: We have SkillsFirst as an option. You can use the AI tools and then submit for a review by the FSE Career Center staff.

Workshop presentations and other tools are found on our website.

Backup

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Common Behavioral Interviewing Questions

- 1. Tell me about a project or role that you've taken on that is outside your job description.**
- 2. Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond at work without being asked.**
- 3. Describe a time when you had trouble seeing eye to eye with a colleague. How did you handle the situation?**
- 4. Give me an example of when you worked with a group or team of people to complete a project.**

Common Behavioral Interviewing Questions

- 1. Tell me about a time that you received a significant amount of critical feedback. How did you handle the situation?**
- 2. Talk about a time when you were faced with a difficult decision and describe how it turned out.**
- 3. Give me an example of a time when you were forced to make an important decision without all of the necessary information.**

Common Behavioral Interviewing Questions

- 1. Describe a time when you needed to persuade a person or group to do something they didn't want to do.**
- 2. Tell me about a time when you faced a lot of obstacles to achieving a goal.**
- 3. Talk about a stressful situation you've experienced. How did you handle it?**
- 4. Tell me about a time when you failed.**

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Often negative examples show your business acumen and your resilience. It also shows you have reflected on these difficult times and gained an understanding of yourself and hopefully planned how to improve yourself.

Examples of Critical Thinking Questions

- **A car is travelling along a highway carrying helium balloons in the rear seat. The car has a head on collision and comes to a rapid stop. Which direction do the balloons travel? Why?**
- **On a canoe in a pool, you take a 16 pound bowling ball out of the canoe and throw it in the pool. What happens to the water level of the pool?**

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Interviewers are far more interested in how you think, how you address problems with unknown variables, etc. than in whether or not you can immediately give them a 'correct' answer.

It is ok to take a minute to think in silence but as you answer the question, talk through your logic. If you need more info for a definitive answer, let the interviewer know that what would happen may depend on x, y, or z. Explain what might happen in each of those scenarios.

Interviewing Skills

STAR Technique Practice: Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership at work.

S/T

- During my last semester of school, I completed an internship at XYZ Corp.
- I was the first intern the department had ever had, and they decided they wanted to continue with an official internship program.
- In order to successfully launch this program, my supervisor asked me to create and administer a training curriculum for the new, incoming interns.

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- To complete this task, I outlined all the procedures the new interns would need to learn, such as how to request engineering time on equipment, how to submit materials for analytical review, and how to order engineering samples.
- Then, I reviewed the list with the supervisors of these new interns. They wanted some different topics added, such as how to fill out a timecard, how to ask for personal time off, and a few other topics.
- Next, I created a three day training agenda covering these topics. I spread the topics out over three days, because as a new employee, covering all of this in one day was overwhelming.
- Finally, I piloted it with four new interns.

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- The training was a huge success.
- On a survey completed after the training, all four interns rated the program a 10 out of 10 in the areas of usefulness and creativity.
- In addition, I was able to confirm with the supervisors that these interns did not need any followup 1:1 training by the supervisors in these task areas. That saved time, improved quality, and allowed the interns to contribute quickly.

Behavioral Interviewing Pitfalls

- **Redundant responses**
 - Don't use the same example (or two) for every question
- **Off target or abstract answers**
- **Incomplete answers (most common)**

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Students need to have multiple examples to share. Most examples should be professional and from past positions. However, students with less work experience can use examples from academic projects, volunteer work, etc. as long as they are relevant and answer the question that was asked.